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### THE CHINESE CHURCH AND THE WORLD CHURCH (By M. S. Bates)

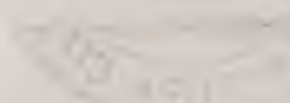
The term, "The Chinese Church," is used in this paper for the total of Protestant bodies and their agencies in China. "The World Church" refers to the total of Protestant bodies and related agencies (in some aspects, certain Orthodox bodies also) throughout the world. The emphasis naturally falls upon those bodies which, in China and in other parts of the world, have considerable community in spiritual consciousness and in Christian activity.

It is not assumed that "organic unity" of all - or of most- Protestants is to be sought, either in China or on a world scale. It is assumed that active fellowship, both in spirit and in work, is a recognized good, leaving to the guidance of God through informed Christian conscience both the form and the degree of cooperative organization for the expression and the fostering of such fellowship.

I. THE PRESENT PHASE. A brief sketch of the Chinese Church is necessary in order that the grounds of relationship to the World Church may be marked out. The Chinese Church is at the threshold of its development from the missionary effort of Western churches. Certain bodies have grown to a high level of autonomy in organization and direction, though they still need and desire various forms of missionary aid if they are to grow vigorously; certain other bodies, whether because of their youth or because of their continuing failure to develop responsible Chinese leadership, remain essentially mission organizations rather than churches; and varying intermediate stages are to be found. In general the growth of Chinese Christian leadership accompanies the growth of church membership in numbers and in experience, the progress of education both Christian and secular, and the related development of missionary attitudes. The process has been speeded up by the long retarded but recently swift growth of national consciousness.

Quantitatively, despite a growth better than tripling of membership in one generation, the Chinese Church remains tiny. Its communicants - 600,000 at the outbreak of the war - constitute one-seventh of one per cent of the total population. They are scattered, divided, many of them newly and shallowly rooted in the Christian tradition. Their own resources, in persons and in finance, are not sufficient to carry at the present level the overwhelming tasks of evangelism, nurture, and service.

Among the divisions resulting mainly from the demoninational, national, and special-group approaches of Western missions - more than one hundred such - some steps of integration have been achieved. There are the unions of all types of Episcopalians (Anglican, American, Canadian), of the major American Methodist bodies, of the leading Canadian Nonconformist churches, and of the Church of Christ in China. The



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It is the policy of the Board to publish the Bulletin in English and in the principal languages of the various fields of mission. It is also published in Chinese and Japanese. The Bulletin is sent free of charge to all those who are interested in the work of the Board and in the progress of the Christian mission in the world.

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last named combination includes near twenty bodies, chiefly of the Presbyterian and Reformed stamp, but also some of Congregational and Methodist types, and earlier regional unions besides independent Chinese churches. The Church of Christ in China comprises some twenty-three per cent of all Chinese Protestants. At present the eleven largest church bodies constitute eighty-six percent of the entire Protestant membership in China.

Cooperation, largely consultative rather than truly operative, is most adequately pictured in the National Christian Council, which represents some fifty-eight to sixty per cent of Protestant membership. Its constituent units, the China Christian Educational Association and the Commission on Christian Medical Work, both include above ninety per cent of Protestant work in their respective fields. There is an approach to unity in the publication of the Scriptures, and considerable collaboration in the production and distribution of Christian literature, including Sunday School and religious education materials. A majority of the Christian colleges and universities, and certain middle schools and hospitals, are union enterprises. There are a number of city-wide and regional church councils. Yet it must be repeated that the basic structure of Protestantism in China, small even in its totals, is divided in more than a hundred separate organizations, most of them pitifully weak. Thus the need for fellowship and for cooperation is acute.

II. DANGERS TO BE FACED. Few Chinese Protestants have any glimpse of the great potentialities of fellowship in the World Church or of their opportunity and duty to contribute to that fellowship and its growth. Their own training and outlook have been in such narrow grooves of localism and of denominationalism that the wider heritage and outlook have remained hidden. If a man does not know and love his fellow Christians of the same city but of another denomination or if he does not know and love his fellow Christians of the same denomination but of another province or country, how can he know and love the world-wide fellowship?

The growth of national consciousness - in many of its aspects healthy, needful, and long desired by missionaries - brings its perils in China as elsewhere in the world. In the proper purpose of rooting Christianity in the customs, thought, and trends of Chinese society, there is risk that the adaptation be too complete, that the distinctive and the universal elements of Christianity should be consciously or unconsciously weakened in conformity to the pressures of the vast non-Christian bulk of China. Excessive accommodation would result in a tribal religion, a "nationalized Christianity similar to the convenient tool-religions desired by notorious totalitarian regimes.

The growth of church autonomy, with the decline of mission direction, affords proper opportunity to modify or to drop forms of organization, of teaching, or of worship which were brought from the "sending" country and are felt to be alien or ineffective in Chinese society. But here is required a universal spirit and broad understanding to discern what is essential and normal to Christianity and what is a peculiar acquisition of one branch of the Church in a particular Western land. Only Chinese who share in the total Christian tradition and who are in the living fellowship of the World Church are likely to be capable of such discernment.

Affirmatively, there is need to foster, by specific education and by experience in spiritual and practical cooperation, both knowledge and active appreciation of the wider fellowships. Negatively, there should be persistent guard against repudiation, conscious or unconscious, by personal narrowness or by institutional neglect of the World Church.





III. ORGANIZATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. Means of fellowship, aid and conference are already available, if church leaders have the will to use them.

The larger denominational groups offer such relationships with Christians in a number of countries and their opportunities should be utilized. However, these relationships are always within the limitations of denominational traditions and carry the danger that denominational distinctions appear more important than hearty collaboration with other Christian groups in the same community or in China as a whole.

Most of the churches of Western lands have joined the World Council of Churches - in process of formation - which they enter as denominations and not through consultative or collaborative agencies like the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America or the British Council of Churches.

The Chinese Church has thus far found its most effective channel of world-wide relationships through the position of the National Christian Council in the International Missionary Council, which body connects the associated missionary societies of the "sending" countries (such as the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, the British Conference of Missionary Societies, and comparable groups in Europe) with national councils of their equivalents in some thirty "mission lands." In the Madras Conference of 1938, the latest general gathering of the International Missionary Council, the Chinese delegation numbered more than forty in a total of some four hundred and fifty, with great benefits to both the Christian Church and to the World Church. The relationship of the International Missionary Council to the World Council of Churches, and the closely connected question of the method and extent of representation for the Chinese and other Younger Churches in the World Council of Churches are under active consideration. Leaders of these two bodies are determined to conserve the advantages already realized in the International Missionary Council, with its specialized attention to the needs and the relationships of the Younger Churches, while making adequate adaptation to the new opportunities of the World Council - which is based upon the large membership and the long-established denominational traditions of European and American Churches.

A new development of considerable interest to the Chinese Church is the proposed establishment of a Far Eastern Office of the International Missionary Council, to operate in collaboration with the present New York and London offices. It now seems likely that a provisional Far Eastern Office will be started in India, the country which contains the largest Protestant membership outside of Europe and America. Aside from the important question of numbers, the possible locations - such as China, Japan and the Philippine Islands - have all been involved in the war to a degree that would hamper present collaboration among Christians of the Far East. The Philippines have a certain geographical advantage in their easy communications with China, Japan, and the East Indies. It must not be forgotten that the Indies contain the second largest body of Protestants in Asia. But the fact of place, not yet finally determined, is unimportant compared with the opportunities of more adequate cooperation, within the framework of the World Church, among the churches of various Far Eastern countries. Over and above all general concerns, the Chinese Church has especial need of close contact with Christian bodies in Southeast Asia because of the requirements of several million Chinese residing there in several different states and societies.

IV. THE GOAL IN VIEW. The preceding discussions of dangers and of organizational opportunities reveal the aim of broad and helpful fellowship, of realizing the true universality of the Christian Church. No human mind can set limits to the potentialities of the Church, and none should try to prescribe a course for the development of



its fellowship. Yet we must try to understand the nature of these great relationships of spiritual brotherhood, in order that we may serve them wisely, aiding and not hampering their wholesome growth.

The fellowship of Christians, in whatever rightful form and measure alike local and world-wide, is in itself a prime value - of the very essence of the Church. That fellowship implies common appreciation of truth, common teaching, common worship, even if particular emphases vary. From one Bible and from a common Christian tradition and experience do we learn of "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," whatever differences men have made among them.

We have learned in some degree, and we crave to learn yet more in deed and in spirit, of the growth of love and power in appreciative exchange of experience, in conference upon the common Christian task, in doing together those things which we do less wisely and less effectively if we strive by separate ways. We know our own need and that of the world that, upon great issues of morality, welfare, and peace, Christians should speak with combined voice. Especially where the Church is small and divided, as in China, we know how desperate is the need that the service of the best leaders should aid the growth of all - not confined within the fences of one denomination or of one country. We are grateful for mutual contributions in persons, in Christian thought and literature, in hymns, in pictures, and in architecture. They enrich us each from the entire Christian treasure, old and new.

May God continually deepen and broaden our fellowship, teaching us in neighborly appreciation and collaboration to understand the wider family and lifting us in the world-wide relationships above the local inertia and pettiness that have too often blocked our vision of the Kingdom.

- M. Searle Bates

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